15/4/73

Battn
Bgde
Division
B Coy, No 6 platoon
} fleet!

Field Service Coy } – 'terriers barking!

Dominica II Passionis
seu IN Palmis.
Die 15 Aprilis
anno ab Incarne. Xti.
1973.

that's meant to read Incarnatione

Dearest René

Many thanks for yr letter written on April 10. '73
& for yr kindness in 'phoning me to assure me
that my letters had arrived safely.
Interesting that you should mention letters sent
for Sidmouth want the date of the year.
because I so often complain inwardly when
Chaps put, for example, 'Friday' or maybe
'Friday 2nd' & no more. It's damned annoying
should one chance to read the letter
some time later. reminds one of
Taplow's 'Which M.?' I've not able
to write a proper letter being of late
fairly mouldy with a packet of the
old nerve trouble – blast it. But
wont bother you with talk of that.
but thought I'd try & answer
one or two of the questions you have
raised in letters – not the question
"'caird' – non caird" but simpler ones
about the 1st War, Robt Graves &
what precisely was my unit. Well,
and this is for your own personal
information since you ask it.
My Division was the 38th (Welsh)
Division and I was in the
113th Infantry Brigade of the Div.
and the 15th Batt. RWF. I was in
'B' Coy of that Batt. in Number 6
platoon. At least for practically
all the time – for a while I
was in the Field Survey Company.
But for only a few months
Got the sack for that job
because of my inefficiency in
getting the right degrees of
Enemy gun-flashes – as I've
told you long ago – I remember
how amused you were about how
we were not allowed to mention

X I mean this for I've always deliberately made it vague in my writings so this information is confidential to you.

NB Again most of the letter has been
lost though. So excuse lacunae, & messing
of all sorts. Want to get it in envelope
& stamped or another day will pass before
it gets sent off.
David

on the Field Telephone the probable calibre of weapon e.g. 4.2 Howitzer
firing at so many degrees & seconds, but had to follow a list of
dog's names from terrier up to Great Dane according the size
of gun ~~the~~ took it to be by nature of flash, here 'Fox-hound
barking (~~or~~ I believe 'baying' was the correct term for fox-hound)
at such & such degrees & seconds. But my trouble was that
in the process of getting hold of the field telephone I
usually managed to jolt the dial of the theodolite & so
gave the inexact bearing. It was in a pitch-dark half-smashed
wind-mill that was swaying in the wind & one was allowed
only to be ~~on~~ very small electric torch to get the bearing & of
course it was all too bloody easy to jolt the beastly
contraption just a tiny bit in finding the speaking-end of
the field telephone — anyway it was no job for me.
And on St David's Day 1917 I found myself in full pack
making some 5 or four miles to the rail-head to get
back to where my battalion were then stationed,
north of Ypres. But in spite of all protests
a railway transport officer insisted on my
getting in a train that instead of taking me
north took me south-west & I found myself
in Rouen or rather in a large camp on
a hill above Rouen. Naturally when I reported
to the authorities there, they said in effect: "But we
have no information about you. Your unit is in
the Line in the Boesinghe Sector, north of the Ypres
Salient." I explained how ~~[illegible]~~ the
Railway Transport officer at X had insisted
on my ~~[illegible]~~ taking this train. They said
"Sounds pretty fishy, but we'll have to
wait till we get confirmation from your
battalion — in ~~the~~ mean time you'll have to
~~to~~ stay in camp here." It took
them about ~~[illegible]~~ three weeks or four,
~~[illegible]~~ to get the required information.
Eventually I was returned to my battalion.
One would have thought it a simple enough
matter to 'phone from Rouen to ~~a~~
~~battalion~~ Div, Bde, or Battalion in the Line.
But apparently not. Of course one
solitary private soldier was hardly
~~[illegible]~~ worth the trouble. Anyway, I
~~event~~ eventually got back again along
with a fresh ~~draft~~ draft of R.W.F. newly
come from England. One advantage of my
short stay with the Field Survey Company was
that I saw bits of our front line that
otherwise I would have missed, for the
Observation post in the rickety mill
was one of three posts we used
in that sector one being in or
just in front of 'Plugstreet' wood
which was an amazing place with a
complex meander of entrenchments a bit,
more like a German 'defence in depth'

than our usually very flimsy trench lines. That very great distinction, both at the time and ever since, was most marked. We developed something a bit more ~~[illegible]~~ like the German, but not to any extent. Kiplings 'thin red line' seemed to be innate to our tradition — I always remember Tiger Dawson again & again in conversation reffering to the cardinal difference of the German or French etc. being in column while we marched in column only to deploy in line.

I remember once in particular being ~~[illegible]~~ on a working-party (in the Bois Grenier Sector) sometime in late 1917 one Lieutenant, a sergeant & about half dozen or less privates, with about thirty Portuguese to wire a support or reserve ~~support~~ line. When we arrived there was nothing but a slight indention in the soil with ~~RE~~ some white tapes placed in position by the REs. It was a very quiet bit of frontage. but a few ~~[illegible]~~ Jerry shells were falling a bit further back the Portugese simply got down into a ditch by the road side & nothing would move them I'm not implying that the Portugese were cowards, but they were peasants suddenly finding themselves in an essentially industrial type of war & shellfire they would not put up with — man for man any one of them would have ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ taken on any of us with ease & in fact there all sorts of stories of them fighting & knifing chaps over girls — but however that may be I do know that shell-fire they could not abide. Sorry for that digression on the Portugese, for the point was that ~~the~~ there was no support* trench — and we did not know quite what to do. the Lieutenant & the sergeant & the few privates tried to put up what wire we could & made some attempts at deepening the shallow indention left by the REs. But it would soon be the beginnings of dawn & the young officer in charge of party was almost in tears for he had to report back before it was light that the job had been accomplished

* or 'reserve' would be more accurate.

I have forgotten in 1973 what haphed in 1917. As far as I can remember we got what little we coned, throttled a coil or two of barbed wire into a stream near by & moved off back to the front-line. Can't remember what happened to the portugese – I imagine now that the light shell-fire had petered out, they followed us back. The Welsh sergeant was ~~furious~~ almost beside himself with rage ~~beside himself with rage~~ ~~but his threat~~ but as there was no common language, his threats to 'shoot the bastards' ~~was~~ not only fell on deaf ears but also recieved ~~an~~ a most alarmed reprimand from the unfortunate lieutenant. It was a most unhappy affair. But it seemd incredible to me for ~~that~~ had Jerry chanced to penetrate over that bit of front line there was nothing to ~~retired~~ retire upon for some distance back – as far as I knew. This may have been, & in my experience was, an ~~[illegible]~~ exceptional lack of any defence in depth. But in other places the rear defences were pretty feeble.

There was another point you mentioned but cant remember what it was – ah yes! It chances that *Tales of Army Life* is the only book of Tolstoy I read probably & I remember being amused about how 'He' is for soldiers those opposed to them. It was certainly universal with us. I dont think Bob Graves is ~~right~~ right in saying that officers ~~the ranks~~ used – now I've lost yr letter – but was it 'Fritz'? whereas the ranks used 'him' – I can't recollect any difference – in the ranks calling 'Fritz' was very commonly used. I think the term 'Bosches' was more used by commissioned ranks – but more, may be, among the higher commissioned ranks – on the other hand my friend Leslie Poulter very frequently ~~said~~ spoke of 'Bosches' (cant spell it) but Leslie was ~~[illegible]~~ *partly* Swiss I think or anyway, though tremendously 'English' in the sense that Harman is English, had many continental affinities. In the ranks we often used 'Squarehead' or old Jerry – "That poor old 'squarehead' ~~that~~ they brought in fr last night's raid looked pretty far gone to me." "How many ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ of our mob caught a nasty one?" – "Yes, and that's not counting the covering-party." "May be – but ~~[illegible]~~ Sergeant Hughes & Mr Talbot, ~~probably perished~~, looked to me in a vy bad way & are probably dead by now."

Forgive this wholly boring stuff, René. but yr questions re-called in me incidents of the post-*P.I.* period.

I cant find a long letter I wrote away back in answer to your typed letter — but it's here somewhere in my muddle of papers — when I find it I'll send it. Lord! the muddle I'm in with unanswered letters of all kinds. As I say above somewhere. I've not been at all up to scratch of late. I find the thing I mentioned on 'phone i.e. the translation into French of *The Tribune's Visitation* & an article about my stuff by Professor Louis Bonnerot is not in the periodical *L'Etudes Anglaises* but in another periodical called *ÉTVDES*, Avril 1973, address 15. rue Monsieur. 75 Paris 7e It is a review founded by the Society of Jesus in 1856. *La Visite du Tribun* is the combined effort of Louis Bonnerot, Lucien Malarmey & Jean Mambrino S.J. but the article, pages 575–588 is ~~[illegible]~~ done by Louis Bonnerot It's entitled *David Jones Poète du Sacré* & then quote *Il se plaça dans l'ordre des signes*.

I'd like to know how you like the trans. As you know my knowledge of the tongue of sweet France is virtually nil. But I thought, in some places especially, it was better than the original. For one thing I had to use the word 'sir', because when one was speaking to a mere regimental sergeant-major, or ~~[illegible]~~ the Commanding Officer or the King himself, there was only 'sir,' without exception, whereas ~~the~~ translators used *Commandant*. – which seemed much better.. in this case. ~~[illegible]~~

⑥

Quite incidentally, you know I use Idem in me on the inscription on title page of Tribune's visitation, as that was known to be the words said at the sacramentum but the words of the sacramentum were not known. But Louis Bonnerot found the Vegetius writing after the Empire had become Xtian; gives it in full in its Xtian form as it had then become. Can't quote it here. too long but it is very emphatic in equating Romanitas with Xtianitas. Jolly odd how different Latin names look in French. "Végèce, écrivain latin de la ~~fin~~ fin du IVe siècle etc." — I at first did not recognize 'Vegetius' of Epitoma Rei Militaris in the form Végèce

Must stop dear René & get someone to post this long letter love to Joan & to yourself of course.

yrs ever.

Dai

Wish I felt more alive & could cope better.

Poor old Bernard W. is ill with a gastric ulcer. I heard this fr Alec Dru & his wife & daughter they had been to see Bernard just before coming to see me.